



FELLOW NEWS

News for and about the NOAA Fellows

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FOCUS ON FELLOWS: **Vanessa Levesque**



Coastal Fellow Vanessa Levesque was born and grew up in Milford, Connecticut, a town that hugs the shore of Long Island Sound. As a child Vanessa spent a great deal of time outdoors and loved going to the beach and playing in the yard. She didn't realize at the time that her enjoyment of nature would play an important role in her future career plans.

"I can't say that I have always wanted to be involved in environmental issues," says Vanessa, whose undergraduate

degree at Dartmouth was in environmental and evolutionary biology. "It wasn't until I became active in Dartmouth's outdoor club that I recognized how much I loved being outside. I also loved biology, so I simply decided to combine my two favorite topics when it came time to choose a major. What could be better than taking a class that required me to spend my afternoons in the field and lab learning about plants and animals I had come to love?" she adds.

Instead of going straight into a master's degree program, Vanessa chose a vocation far from home. "After undergrad, I decided to join the Peace Corps and spent three years in Uganda in East Africa, doing community conservation work. I enjoyed learning about another culture, and I discovered that no conservation project could ever be successful without local support and desire.

"When I returned to the U.S, I knew what I really wanted to do was work with people to explore and strengthen connections with the environment," says Vanessa. During her stint in the Peace Corps, she was struck by the "disconnect" between scientists and local communities. "I was interested in bridging that gap, so that scientific information would be more accessible and meaningful to local people, and scientists and managers would be more cognizant of cultural needs and knowledge," she recalls.

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NOAA Coastal Services Center
LINKING PEOPLE, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY

Vanessa realized it was time to further her education, and she went on to earn a master's degree in natural resource planning from the University of Vermont. "I developed research to examine how ecological and social information is incorporated into natural resource decisions in Vermont. In my master's research, I focused on river and watershed systems, which led me to become increasingly interested in issues related to managing public resources such as rivers, watersheds, and bays."

Lake Champlain Sea Grant at the University of Vermont advertised the fellowship program and Vanessa applied and was accepted. She works with two entities—the Maine Department of Marine Resources in Boothbay Harbor and the coastal program of the Maine State Planning Office in Augusta.

Vanessa is helping to craft the Maine Bay Management Study, an initiative examining whether Maine needs to find a new way to manage nearshore areas. "More specifically, we are exploring whether or not the state should develop a more regional, bay-centered approach to nearshore management," says Vanessa.


The study will conclude with a final report and proposal to the Maine state legislature in January 2007—which will be six months after Vanessa's fellowship has ended. Fortunately, she has recently been offered a short-term contract to extend her stay at the state planning office. "I am excited to continue with this study until next January so that I can help write the final recommendations and plan the concluding series of public meetings on our proposal," says Vanessa.

The fellowship program has provided Vanessa with invaluable

experiences she will remember long after her time has ended. "I feel extremely lucky to have mentors that encourage me and a staff team that treats me as an equal. I have been given both responsibility and support, which has allowed me to test out ideas in our weekly team meetings and help shape the bay management study as it progresses. In particular, I am grateful for the opportunity to develop our public meetings to be interactive and meaningful for those involved, as compared with traditional public-hearing meetings.

"I also appreciate the opportunity to travel to conferences and trainings. I had never attended a professional conference when I was in graduate school. Finally, I love my 'fellow' fellows! I'm so glad to have been able to interact with them over the last two years," she adds.

Vanessa has built a solid foundation and will look for future opportunities to continue her work, wherever it may take her. After her short-term contract ends, she would love to move to Portland, Maine. "I'm ready for some city life! The more distant future is still a bit uncertain. I am very interested in collaborative processes and consensus building, especially in terms of managing coastal resources. However, I need to figure out whether I should go back for a Ph.D., find a job at an organization that does that type of work, or pursue this goal indirectly through a more general coastal management position. Only time will tell!"

For more information on the program in Maine, contact Vanessa at Vanessa.Levesque@maine.gov or visit www.state.me.us/dmr/baystudy/baystudy.htm. 

FOCUS ON FELLOWS: Lihla Noori



Lihla Noori, the coral reef management fellow on the island of Rota in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), was born and raised in Montreal, Canada. At the age of 17, she and her family moved to Florida, where she earned a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

Lihla's wide-ranging college experiences—which included teaching and studying overseas—helped shape her future goals and ambitions.

"Study abroad in Costa Rica helped spark my interest in conservation-related social and environmental issues. Also, a variety of environmental and educational jobs strengthened my desire to become more involved at the local community level. I learned how to help catalyze behavior changes that could directly affect the future sustainability of a community and the livelihoods of its members," says Lihla.

Later, as part of the WorldTeach nonprofit program, Lihla volunteered to teach English in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and truly enjoyed the culture and atmosphere. "Living in the pristine environment of Ebon Atoll allowed me to snorkel, spearfish, and dive in impressive lagoons," says Lihla, who loved the beauty of the marine seascape. "We lived without electricity or telephone. Our food, recreation, and travel depended upon the health of the coral reef and its ability to withstand everyday pressures such as solid waste, overharvesting, and people walking on the reef."

Lihla was immersed in the Marshallese island culture and language. This proved to be a life-altering experience that changed how she viewed the world and her place in it. Awed by the simplicity of life and the islands' calm, warm waters, she found a way to return for another year. She was hired by the RMI's Environmental Protection Agency and was the first person in the republic to work solely on biodiversity conservation issues.

Lihla learned about the fellowship program while at an Independence Day party held by the U.S. Embassy of the RMI. Two previous fellows—Qamar Schuyler of the CNMI and Melissa Bos of Hawaii—recruited her on the day the application was due. Fortunately, because of the time change, she still managed to apply before the deadline.

Last February, Lihla began her two-year coral fellowship for the CNMI. Her solid background in

international teaching, facilitating, and program development has served her well. As a project manager, she works with all the environmental government agencies on the island, and she also coordinates several U.S. Coral Reef Task Force projects. "Work is a quarter mile from home, where everybody knows your name," she jokes. One effort, the Talakhaya Revegetation Project, was formed to educate the community about the effects of wildfires on the nearby coral reef and to restore the Talakhaya watershed. This area has been repeatedly burned by hunters who want to attract deer. The resulting increase in sediment on the reef covers the coral in turf algae and clouds the waters.


"I also assist the CNMI marine monitoring team, helping them expand the reef flat and benthic monitoring to Rota," she says. The Rota team conducts regular assessments, comparing this island to others in the region and then taking appropriate coastal management measures. In addition, Lihla works with the Sasanhaya Bay Fish Reserve to determine potential development of a community-driven management plan for this marine protected area. She is seeking improvements to the reserve's signage, boundaries, and outreach materials.

For Lihla, the fellowship program has been an invaluable experience. "I have been moved by my direct influence on such a small island. In less than six months, I can truly say this is my dream job. The fellowship is a perfect blend of

celebrations and challenges, making problems and solving them, field and office work, and government and community interaction. This broad spectrum allows me to create a new canvas every day. If I never occupy a post as finely matched as this one, I will be satisfied knowing this is as good as it gets," she says.

Lihla is focusing on her current projects and also on the path she'll take once her two-year fellowship ends. She will earn her master's degree in experiential education from Minnesota State University in July 2006. In addition, she is pursuing a postgraduate certificate in natural resource management from James Cook University in Cairns, Australia.

"Geographically, I would love to settle in the Pacific. I would like to stay in the coral conservation field in the coordination, project-management, and capacity-building role that I presently occupy. Eventually, I hope to start a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that deals with increasing capacity in the Pacific for environmental management. This NGO would provide consultants specializing in grant writing, project design and management, strategic and project planning and management, and environmental training for government agencies in sustainable-development topics."

For more information about the projects in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, contact Lihla at lihla.noori@gmail.com. 

FOCUS ON THE COASTAL FELLOWSHIP:

2006-2008 Coastal Management Fellows Selected

Six fellows were matched with six state coastal zone management programs at this year's matching workshop, which was held April 25 through 28, 2006, in Charleston, South Carolina. The topics to be addressed in these two-year fellowships include monitoring condition compliance, coastal growth, floodplain management, shoreline erosion, geographic information system development, and public access.



California

Elijah Davidian, from the University of Michigan and nominated by Michigan Sea Grant, will be working with the California Coastal Commission to develop a tool to help with compliance with the California Coastal Act. He will develop a program for monitoring condition compliance by creating a pilot program in two of the commission's district offices, putting the pilot in place, and assessing and modifying the pilot as necessary. He will also design and implement a database that will facilitate efficient monitoring of condition compliance.



Maine

Dianna Jones, from the University of Washington and nominated by the Washington Sea Grant Program, will be working with the Maine Coastal Program to evaluate how effective coastal towns and cities have been in implementing comprehensive plans and to identify opportunities to institutionalize new approaches to manage growth in Maine's coastal communities.



Massachusetts

Wesley Shaw, from Oregon State University and nominated by Oregon Sea Grant, was matched with the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management to develop and implement planning, policy, regulatory, and technical assistance tools to improve coastal floodplain management in Massachusetts.



Ohio

Amanda Wenczel, from the University of Delaware and nominated by the Delaware Sea Grant Program, was matched with the Ohio Office of Coastal Management to develop the Lake Erie Shore Erosion Management Plan (LESEMP) by synthesizing data gathered from existing shore erosion plans, identifying information gaps, and incorporating new findings into the LESEMP.



U.S. Virgin Islands

Jordan Gass, from Duke University and nominated by North Carolina Sea Grant, was matched with the U.S. Virgin Islands Coastal Zone Management Program to develop, implement, and operate a functioning geographic information system (GIS) office for the program by inventorying needs, creating a GIS database, and training the staff on using the software. He will also create a working group of governmental, nongovernmental, and nonprofit agencies to collaborate on GIS-related work.



Virginia

Jacqueline Shapo, from the College of Charleston and nominated by the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, was matched with the Virginia Coastal Program to create a searchable on-line resource to improve public access to coastal zone information and encourage nature-based tourism. She will also be working to develop access standards for the Middle Peninsula of Virginia to aid the state in acquiring land.

FOCUS ON THE CORAL FELLOWSHIP:

Coral Updates

American Samoa

During the last few months, Sharon Gulick, the coral reef management fellow in the Territory of American Samoa, has divided her time among a number of different projects. Sharon has been working with the Coral Reef Advisory Group to identify ways human dimensions can be better incorporated into local action strategies. She participated in a workshop on ocean research planning sponsored by the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (JSOST) in April, and she is helping to develop a plan to guide, shape, and prioritize the types of ocean research conducted in American Samoa. Finally, she has helped to publish booklets and coordinate internships with local resource agencies.

Guam

Romina King, coral reef management fellow in Guam's coastal management program, is working to create a new group named Guardians of the Reef. This group will be an extension of Marine Mania, a local organization at George Washington High School. She has met with Linda Tatreau, marine biology teacher and Marine Mania advisor, to develop the strategic, budgetary, and funding elements needed to launch the new group. For the 2006-2007 school year, Guardians of the Reef will include approximately 40 eleventh and twelfth graders. These students will engage and empower Guam's youth to become active stewards of their island



environment. The Guardians will undergo a conflict-resolution course to build trust and teamwork. They will also complete 20 hours of academic work specific to coral reefs and island ecosystems and will visit Guam's marine protected areas. Group members will create and conduct an environmental education program for all third-grade classrooms within Guam's public education system. Their program will be based on lesson plans provided by NOAA's Ocean Service (<http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education>).

Hawaii

Fellow Katie Seigler's last day will be June 30, 2006. We wish Katie the best of luck! A new scope of work is under development, and the position will soon be advertised on www.eco.org.

Puerto Rico

In recent months, Maria del Mar Lopez-Rivera, the coral reef management fellow of Puerto Rico, has organized several educational activities as part of the jurisdiction's local action strategy. A workshop was conducted on marine species identification for the rangers, the law enforcers of the DNER. A guide for marine species identification was also prepared to aid the rangers in their work and will be used as an educational tool throughout the island. Planning is underway for the next rangers' workshop for western Puerto Rico. Maria del Mar also participated in the organization of a June workshop on land-based sources of pollution. The workshop addressed erosion and sediment control for protection of rivers, reservoirs, and coral reefs. Recently, she also assisted with a capacity-building workshop for marine protected area managers. Maria del Mar continues to work on the management plans for natural reserves (NR) that have a marine component. Having completed the plan for the Vieques NR, she is currently working on the management plan for Mona Island NR, Puerto Rico's pristine and most ecologically important island.

U.S. Virgin Islands

The scope of work for the Coral Reef Management Fellowship in the Virgin Islands is currently under development, and the position will soon be advertised on www.eco.org.

CREDITS AND INFORMATION

Fellow News is published by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Services Center to relay information about the fellowship program and provide a forum for information exchange among fellows, mentors, Sea Grant, and the Center.

Please send your questions and suggestions for future editions to
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UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

JULY

9–12: **Natural Hazards Center Annual Hazards Research and Applications Workshop**
Boulder, Colorado
www.colorado.edu/hazards/workshop/2006/

12–16: **CoastGIS '06**
Wollongong and Sydney, New South Wales, Australia
www.uow.edu.au/science/eesc/conferences/coastgis06.html

SEPTEMBER

3–8: **30th International Conference on Coastal Engineering**
San Diego, California
www.ICCE2006.com

10–13: **7th International Conference on HydroScience and Engineering**
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
<http://thor.cae.drexel.edu/ICHE2006/>

17–20: **California and the World Ocean Conference 2006**
Long Beach, California
<http://resources.ca.gov/ocean/cwo06/>

For more information on upcoming events, please visit www.csc.noaa.gov/cms/conferences.html.

NOAA COASTAL SERVICES CENTER TRAINING

**Training classes are limited to project partners and NOAA line offices.*

JULY

19–20:
Project Design and Evaluation –
California Coastal Commission

AUGUST

7–8:
Project Design and Evaluation –
Ace Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve

21–22:
Introduction to ArcGIS –
NOAA Coastal Services Center

23–25:
Coastal Applications Using ArcGIS –
NOAA Coastal Services Center

23–25:
Project Design and Evaluation –
North Carolina Cooperative Extension

SEPTEMBER

19–21:
Project Design and Evaluation –
Florida Sea Grant Program

For more information on these courses and other training offered by the Center, please visit
www.csc.noaa.gov/training/.

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